The Dual Nature and the Duel Within

(No. 1459B)
DELIVERED BY
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members." Romans 7:23.

I QUESTION whether any man understands himself and I am quite certain that no Christian does. "Great is the mystery of godliness" in more senses than one! The Believer is a great riddle to those who observe him—"he is discerned of no man." He is equally an enigma to himself. The frequency of books like Venning's, "Orthodox Paradoxes," and good Ralph Erskine's, "Believer's Riddle," is not at all amazing, for a thousand riddles may be made about the Christian since he is a paradox from beginning to end. As Plato used to say of each man that he was two men, so may we with emphasis say of each Christian that he is two men in one.

Oftentimes to himself the evil man within him appears to be uppermost and yet, by the Grace of God, he never can be, for the ultimate victory belongs to the new and spiritual life. We see in every Christian what was seen in the Shulamite in the Song, "as it were the company of two armies." This is not always known by the Believer when he commences the new life. He starts knowing that he is a sinner and that Jesus is his Savior, but as he proceeds, he finds that he is more a sinner than he thought he was. Many surprises await him and some things which, if he is not prepared for them, will stagger him as though some strange thing had happened to him.

Perhaps my discourse on this subject may prevent a new convert from being overwhelmed with unexpected storms and help him to solve the question which will arise in his mind, "If I were a child of God, could it be thus with me?" Our first head will be, THERE ARE IN ALL BELIEVERS TWO PRINCIPLES. The Apostle speaks of the law of his mind and then of another law in his members warring against the law of his mind. The converted man is a new man in Christ Jesus, but the old nature remains within him. The first life in a Christian, in order of time, is the old Adam nature. It is there from the first. It is born of and with the flesh and it remains in us after we are born of the Spirit, for the second birth does not destroy in us the products of the first birth.

Regeneration brings into us a new and higher principle which is ultimately to destroy the sinful nature, but the old principle still remains and labors to retain its power. Some fancy that the carnal mind is to be improved, gradually tamed and sanctified—but it is enmity against God and is not reconciled to God—neither, indeed, can be. The old nature is of the earth, earthy, and must be crucified with Christ and buried with Him, for it is alto-

gether too bad for mending! This old nature lives in our members, that is to say, its nest is the body and it works through the body.

There are certain appetites of ours which are perfectly allowable, no, even necessary to existence, but they can be very easily pushed to sinful extremes and then that which is lawful and right becomes a nest for that which is unlawful and wrong. It is a commendable thing that a man should seek to provide for his own household, yet how many crimes and how much covetousness come into the world from an inordinate indulgence of that desire? A man may eat and drink, yet it is through those appetites that a thousand sins are engendered. A man, when he is in his right condition, puts a bit into the mouth of his desires and holds them in as with bit and bridle. His higher nature governs his bodily appetites, but not without great effort, for ever since the fall of Adam, the machine works irregularly and is not properly controlled by that which should be the ruling force.

I have heard of some professors who dream that sin is utterly destroyed in them and that they have no more evil tendencies and desires. I shall not controvert their notion. If it is so, I congratulate them and greatly wish it were so with me. I have, however, had some little experience of perfect people and I have generally found them the most disagreeable, touchy and sensitive persons in the world! And some of them have turned out to be such detestable hypocrites that I am rather afraid of a person who has no imperfections. As soon as I learn that a Brother states that he has lived for months

without sin, I wonder whether his secret vice is lewdness, or theft, or drink—and I feel sure that somewhere or other there is a leak in the ship!

The sin which lurks in the flesh will grow weaker in proportion as the holy principle, of which I have to speak, grows stronger. And it is at no time to be tolerated or excused—we are to fight against it, conquer it and ultimately it is to be destroyed in us, root and branch—yet there it is and let not the young Christian be staggered when he finds it there. When we are born again there is dropped into our soul the living and incorruptible Seed of the Word of God which lives and abides forever. It is akin to the Divine Nature and cannot sin because it is born of God—it has no tendency to sin, but all its appetites are heavenward and Christ-ward. It never stoops from its high position; it is always aspiring towards Heaven. It is at deadly enmity with the old nature which it will, in the end, destroy, but, as I have said before, it has its work to do and it is a work which, assisted even by Divine strength, will not be accomplished all at once. It is a warfare which, when it seems ended, has often to be renewed, since, after long and victorious campaigns, the routed enemy returns to the field.

Now, I would like each Christian to be assured that he has this second principle in him. It may be weak; it may be struggling for an existence; but it is there, my Brothers and Sisters! If you have believed in Jesus, you have the life which hates sin and makes you repent when you have fallen into it. That is the life which cries, "Abba, Father," as often as it thinks of

God. That is the life which aspires after holiness and delights in the Law of God. This is the new-born principle which will not permit you to be at peace if you should wander into sin. It finds no rest but in the bosom of that God from whom it came and in likeness to that God from whom it sprang.

These are the two principles which make up the dual man—the flesh and the spirit—the law of the mind and the law of sin, the body of death and the spirit of life.

We notice, secondly, that THE EXISTENCE OF THESE TWO PRINCIPLES IN A CHRISTIAN NECESSITATES A CONFLICT, even as the text says, "Another law in my members warring against the law of my mind." The lion will not lie down with the lamb in us! Fire will not be on good terms with water. Death will not parley with life, nor Christ with Belial. The dual life provokes a daily duel. I am not sure that the conflict between the new nature and the old is felt by all young Christians at first. Frequently Christian life may be divided into three stages—the first period is that of comfort in which the young Christian rejoices in the Lord and his principal business is to sing and tell what God has done for him. The more of this the better!

After that, very often comes the stage of conflict—instead of being children at home we have grown into men and therefore we must go to war. Under the old law, when a man was married, or had built a house, he was excused from fighting for a season, but when that was over, he must take his place in the ranks. And so is it with the child of God—he may rest awhile but he is destined for the war. The period of conflict is often succeeded, especially in old age, by a third stage which we may call contemplation, in which the Believer sits down to reflect upon the goodness of the Lord towards him and upon all the good things which are in store for him.

This is the land Beulah which John Bunyan describes as lying on the edge of the river and so near to the Celestial City that you can hear the heavenly music across the stream and, when the wind blows that way, you can smell the sweet perfumes from the gardens of the blessed! That is a stage which we must not expect to reach just now. My young Friend, inasmuch as you are at first weak and tender, the Lord may be pleased to screen you from a great many temptations and from the uprisings of your flesh. But the probabilities are that before long you will put down your harp and take up your sword—and your joy of spirit will give place to the agony of conflict.

Sin is in you, lurking in secret places, though it has not as yet leaped forth upon you as a young lion on its prey. You, perhaps, have thought, "I shall do better than those who have gone before me. I shall shine as a brilliant saint." Let not him that puts on his harness boast as though he takes it off. There are fights before you and I warn you of them, so that when you remove from the state of content to the state of conflict you may confess, "Before it came to pass I was warned of this and, therefore, I am prepared for it."

The reason of the fight is this—the new nature comes into our heart, to rule over it—but the carnal mind is not willing to surrender its power. A new throne is set up in the heart and the old monarch, dethroned, outlawed and made to lurk in holes and corners, says to himself, "I will not have this. Why should it be? Here am I, who was once this man's

king, snubbed and made to hide myself as though I were a stranger! I will get the throne back again." Master Bunyan, in his, "Holy War," which is a very wonderful allegory, describes Diabolus, you know, as having his city taken from him.

But, after the city had been taken, there lurked in the holes and corners of that city certain subjects of Diabolus and these were always plotting and planning how they could get the city back. They opened the gates at night to let in their old king. They sowed discontent among the inhabitants. This is the reason for the perpetual strife within our souls. The old lusts that are under ban and curse and which we are hunting to crucify, put their heads together and labor to regain dominion! The flesh will wait till you are in a very quiet frame of mind and feel very secure—and then it will come down upon you with its evil fascinations!

At another time it may be you are in great trouble and you feel ready to sink—and then comes the devil upon you like a roaring lion, hoping to destroy your faith. He knows how to time the temptation and the flesh knows how to rise in insurrection when we are off our guard and when surrounding circumstances are all conducive to sin. We cannot be too watchful, for the flesh will rebel all of a sudden. We may get it down and think we have fettered it securely, but, ah, it finds its hands, it breaks its bonds and lets fly an arrow at our heart! You said, "I shall never be angry again," and while you were congratulating yourself on the sweetness of your temper, you were, all of a sudden, provoked from quite a new quarter and your wrath boiled over again.

"No," you said, "I never shall be impatient again," and yet within a few moments you were as full of murmuring as ever you had been in your life! Till the flesh lies in the grave, sin will not be dead! And let me warn you that the flesh may be doing us more mischief when it seems to be doing no mischief at all than at any other time! During war the sappers and miners will work underneath a city and those inside say, "The enemy is very quiet; we hear no roaring of cannon, we see no capturing of Malakoiffs. Where can the enemy be?" They know their business well enough and are laying their mines for unexpected strokes.

Hence an old Divine used to say that he was never so much afraid of any devil as he was of no devil. That is to say, when Satan does not tempt, it is often our worst temptation! To be let alone tends to breed a dry rot in the soul. "He has not been emptied from vessel to vessel," said the Prophet of old, "he is settled upon his lees"—this spoke he of one who was under Divine displeasure. Stagnation is one of the worst things that can happen to us and so it happens that we are never secure. Thus, dear Friends, I have showed you that there is a conflict within. And let me congratulate you if it is a conflict. The ungodly know no such

inward warfare! They sin and they love it—but where there is spiritual conflict the Grace of God is present!

We do sin, but we hate sin! We fall into it, but we loathe it and fight against it. And every true child of God can say honestly that there is nothing in this world he dreads so much as to grieve his God. If you were dead in sin you would have no trouble about it, but those inward pangs, those deep emotions, those bitter sighs and cries, that exclamation of, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" all indicate spiritual life! While I sympathize with your sorrow I congratulate you that you feel it, for this is one of the marks of a child of God! Forget not that in renewed men there are two opposing forces and that these necessitate a life-long war.

Thirdly, we must now note that this warfare SOMETIMES LEADS US INTO CAPTIVTY. Observe, "I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." "What does that mean?" asks one. It means that when you sin it will be captivity to you if you are a child of God. The sinner may find pleasure in sin, but you will not if you are God's child. You will be like a slave in chains, locked up in a horrible dungeon when you fall into sin.

But does the old nature make Christians captives? Yes, in this way. First, many a Christian feels himself in captivity for the very fact that the old nature has risen within him. Let me explain myself. Suppose that the old nature suggests to you some sin—you hate the sin and loathe it and you despise yourself for lying open to be tempted in such a way. The very fact that such a thought has crossed your mind is bondage to your pure spirit. You do not fall into the sin—you shake off the serpent—but you feel its slime upon your soul.

Do you not know what it is to have a very violent tendency towards an evil, the very thought of which is detestable to you? Your renewed mind exclaims, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" But yet the flesh says, "Do it, do it, do it!" and pictures the sweetness and the pleasure of it. With your whole soul you set yourself against the temptation. The cold sweat stands upon your brow at the very thought of your falling into so foul a transgression and

you cry to God in prayer! But yet the captivity of your soul is great while the trial lasts and even in the remembrance of it. You say to yourself, "I am afraid I dallied with the temptation. The bait would not have been so alluring to me if there had not been some consent of my soul to it."

You also charge your heart with folly, saying, "Though I did not commit that sin, yet there was a hankering after it in me." Though others could not condemn you, but must even honor your self-denial, yet you condemn yourself for any degree of inclination in the wrong direction and you feel that the temptation has brought you, at once, into captivity. What a difference there is between a spot on one thing and a spot on another! A man makes a spot

with ink on my coat and nobody perceives it—but if he were to cast a drop upon this white handkerchief, how soon everybody would see it!

The old nature is like a black coat, too dark to show a blot—but one spot of temptation falling on the pure white linen of the new nature troubles us exceedingly—we see it and we loathe it and we cry out to God that we may get rid of it. The very passing of temptation across a renewed soul brings it into captivity. I stood one day in Rome looking at a very large and well executed photograph of a street and an ancient temple. I had never seen so fine a photograph, but I noticed that right across the middle of it was the trace of a mule and a cart. The artist had done his best to prevent it, but there was the ghost of that cart and mule all along the way, right across the picture. I do not say it spoiled it, but it certainly did not improve it.

Even so, oftentimes, when our heart is most cleansed and bears best the image of God, right across the fair picture comes the trace of a temptation and we are grieved. An observer unskilled in art might not notice the mark on the photograph, but a careful artist, with a high ideal, is vexed to see his work thus marred. And so with moral stains—that which the common man thinks a trifle is a great sorrow to the pure-hearted child of God and he is brought into captivity by it.

Sometimes, too, a Christian's captivity consists in his losing his joy through the uprising of the flesh. I speak what I am sure many of the children of God here know. You are rejoicing in the Lord and triumphant in His name and, by-and-by, some corruption struggles for the mastery. "It shall not rise," you say. You put it down but it strives and you strive, too—and in the struggle, the joy of the Lord, which was your strength, seems to be taken away from you. A sense of the dreadful fact that the leprosy is in the house of clay in which you live terrifies you and you are so anxious to get the leprosy out of the walls that you would sooner see the old house decay into dust than live where evil so readily approaches you! This sight of inbred sin may cast a chill upon your joy. You want to sing the praises of God, but the temptation comes just at that very minute and you have to battle with it and the song gives place to a battle cry.

It is time for prayer and you are in the attitude of devotion, but somehow you cannot control your thoughts—they will roam here and there under the force of the flesh. My thoughts frequently seem like a lot of colts let loose, tearing over the fields of my soul without restraint. In holy contemplation you try to concentrate your thoughts upon the subject in hand and you cannot—very likely somebody knocks at the door at the same time, or a child begins to cry, or a man begins to grind an organ under your window—how can you meditate? All things seem to be against you. Little outside matters which are trifling to others will often prove terrible disturbers of your spirit and what others smile at, you are made to weep over, for the flesh will lay hold of the most paltry concerns to prevent your coming into commu-

nion with the Lord your God. Thus by taking away our joy, and marring our fellowship, the old corruption within us leads us into captivity.

But, my Brothers and Sisters, this is not all, for we do not always escape from actual sin. We do, in moments of forgetfulness, that which we would willingly undo and say that which we would willingly unsay. The spirit was willing to be perfect, but the flesh was weak—and then the consequence is, to a child of God—that he feels himself a captive. He has yielded to treacherous blandishments and now, like Samson, his locks are shorn. He goes out to shake himself as he did before, but the Philistines are upon him! His God is not with him and it will be a happy thing for him if he does not lose his eyes and come to grind at the mill like a slave. Oh, what need we have to be on our guard and to look to the Strong for strength, for this old nature within us will bring us into captivity if it can and will hold us there!

But I must close with this reflection, that THIS WARFARE AND THIS OCCASIONAL TRIUMPH OF THE FLESH MAKE US LOOK TO CHRIST FOR VICTORY. The Apostle asks, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And his reply is, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Brothers and Sisters, I am persuaded that there is no place so safe and none so proper and fitting for any of us as a sinner's place at the foot of the Cross. I have read a great deal about perfection in the flesh and I have tried to get it. I have also tried to pray after the fashion which I suppose a perfect man would pray—but the theory will not hold water as far as I am concerned.

When I went up to the temple in that way and tried to pray, I found a Pharisee at my elbow. A good way off I saw a poor sinner, striking his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," and I perceived that he went away justified, while I stood there and envied him. I could not stand it! I went back to my old place at the sinner's side and smote my breast, uttering the old cry, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Then I, too, felt at ease and I went home justified and rejoicing in the Lord! Beloved, whenever there is a question between me and the devil as to whether I am a child of God, I have given up seeking evidence in my own favor, or turning to my experience to prove that I am in a state of Grace, for that cunning old lawyer knows more about my infirmities than I do and can very soon bring two to one against me!

My constant way is to tell the accuser," Well, if I am not a saint, I am a sinner, and Jesus came into the world to save sinners, therefore I will go to Christ and look to Him again." The devil cannot answer that! You that are oldest in the Divine Life—and I speak to some who have known the Lord these 50 years—I am sure that you find times in which no mark, evidence, or experience is worth a penny to you by way of comfort and you are led to adopt the simple expedient which I have recommended to all the tempted ones. It will be wise to always live upon Jesus! Begin, again, at the foot of the Cross where you began at first, with the old cry—

"Nothing in my hand I bring! Simply to Your Cross I cling."

That is the way to conquer sin, as well as to overcome despair for, when faith in Jesus comes back to your soul, you will be strong to fight with your corruptions and you will win the victory, which you will never gain if you allow your struggles with your sins to drive you away from your Savior. Let us resort, then, to Christ who gives us the victory and let us, the longer we live, praise Christ the more!

You young Christians, you do not yet know what a dear Savior you have found! You know you have found Him, but He is a dearer Christ than you think He is! You were naked and He has clothed you—yes, He has put the armor upon you which will ward off the darts of the arch-enemy. You were hungry and He has fed you—yes, but He has fed you with immortal bread— He is nourishing a Divine Life within your soul! He has given you peace and you are grateful for it—yes, but He has given you a peace which passes all understanding—that shall keep your heart and mind! You say it is sweet to find Him with you. So it is, but oh, how sweet it will be to have Him with you when you pass through the fires and are not burned; when you go through the floods and are not drowned; when you enter upon the final struggle and are not afraid!

Oh, Beloved, we may find out and shall find out, more of our own needs, but we shall also discover more of Christ's all-sufficient fullness! The storm will become more terrible, but the Pilot's power to rule that storm will only be the more displayed! The ship may rock to and fro till all her timbers are strained and her keel may threaten to snap in two, but—

"He will preserve it, He does steer Even when the boat seems most to reel, Storms are the triumph of His art." He will bring His people safely through the howling wilderness and the land of great drought. Be not afraid, you that have begun the Divine pilgrimage, for His fiery cloudy pillar will attend you! Dragons there are, but by the sword of the Spirit you shall wound the dragon as of old he was wounded at the Red Sea. There will be death to fight with, but Christ has died and you shall be victorious over the grave. Expect conflict! Be not astonished when it comes, but as confidently expect victory and shout in prospect of it!

As surely as the Lord has called you to this celestial warfare, He will bear you through it! You shall sing on the other side of Jordan unto Him that loved you and washed you from your sins in His blood! In the haven of the blessed, in the land of the hereafter, in the home of the holy where the weary are at rest, you shall sing the high praises of God and the Lamb! I would to God this sermon had a relation to all those who hear or read it, but I fear it has not. I can only hope that those who have no conflict within may begin to feel one. May God grant that you may not rest quiet in sin, for to be at peace with sin is to be sleeping yourself into Hell!

May God awaken you, that you may flee to Christ for mercy at this very hour and there shall be joy in His Presence. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 7. HYMNS FROM "OUR: OWN HYMN BOOK" -435, 644, 769.